

Old Cantankerous

[Dyskolos or The Misanthrope]

INTRODUCTORY NOTE TO *OLD CANTANKEROUS*

The play, about a 'loner' at odds with the world, and the effects of his attitude on himself and other people, was first produced at the dramatic festival held in Athens in January, 316 B.C.,¹ when Menander was about twenty-six years old: it won the first prize. It is our first extant Comedy of Manners, and it was produced early in Menander's writing career. His dramatic mastery is already evident in the economy and delicacy with which characters and situations are presented.

The setting is rural and romantic. The shrine is real (it is still there), but its proximity to the two houses is dictated by dramatic necessity. Pan as Prologue sets the scene and explains the necessary background. He is never seen again, but his influence on the play is persistent: his shrine is visibly central, there are constant references to it and to him in the text, and the interest of the god adds both romance and irony to the action.

SYNOPSIS²

A cantankerous man, Knemon, married a widow, who had one son from her previous marriage. They had a daughter, but his wife soon left him because of his behaviour, and he continued to live like a hermit on his farm. Sostratos fell violently in love with the girl and came to ask for her hand. The cantankerous man refused. Sostratos won over her brother, who did not know what to say. Then Knemon fell into a well, and was quickly rescued by Sostratos. He made up the quarrel with his wife, and agreed to give the girl to Sostratos as his legal wife. Then, quite reformed, he gave Sostratos's sister to Gorgias, his wife's son.

PRODUCTION NOTICE³

Produced at the Lenaia in the archonship of Demogenes,⁴ it won first prize. The principal actor was Aristodemos of Skarphe.⁵ An alternative title is *The Misanthrope*.

CHARACTERS

PAN, *the god of country life*

SOSTRATOS, *a young man about town*

CHAIREAS, *his friend*

PYRRHIAS, *his servant*

KNEMON, *a cantankerous old farmer*

A GIRL, *his daughter*

GORGAS, *his step-son*

DAOS, *Gorgias's servant*

SIMICHE, *Knemon's servant*

KALLIPIDES, *Sostratos's father*

GETAS, *his servant*

SIKON, *a cook*

Sostratos's MOTHER and

MYRRHINE, *Knemon's estranged wife*

also appear

ACT ONE

SCENE: a village in Attica, about fourteen miles from Athens. In the centre of the stage is the shrine of Pan and the Nymphs, with statues at its entrance. On the audience's left of this is Knemon's house, on the right that of Gorgias. A statue of Apollo of the Ways stands by Knemon's door.

[Enter PAN from shrine.]

PAN *[addresses audience]*: Imagine, please, that the scene is set in Attica, in fact at Phyle, and that the shrine I'm coming from is the one belonging to that village (Phylaeans are able to farm this stony ground). It's a holy place, and a very famous one. This farm here on my right is where Knemon lives: he's a real hermit of a man, who snarls at everyone and hates company – 'company' isn't the word: he's getting on now, and he's never addressed a civil word to anyone in his life! He's never volunteered a polite greeting to [10] anyone except myself (I'm the god Pan): and that's only because he lives beside me, and can't help passing my door.⁶ And I'm quite sure that, as soon as he does, he promptly regrets it.

Still, in spite of being such a hermit, he did get married, to a widow whose former husband had just died, leaving her with a small son. Well, he quarrelled with his wife, every day and most of the night too – a miserable life. A baby daughter was born, and that just made things worse. Finally, when things got so bad that there [20] was no hope of change, and life was hard and bitter, his wife left him and went back to her son, the one from her former marriage. He owns this small-holding here, next door, and there he's now struggling to support his mother, himself and one loyal family servant. The boy's growing up now, and shows sense beyond his years: experience matures a man.

The old man lives alone with his daughter, and an old servant [30] woman. He's always working, fetching his own wood and doing his own digging – and hating absolutely everyone, from his neighbours here and his wife, right down to the suburbs of Athens. The girl has turned out as you'd expect from her

upbringing, innocent and good. She's careful in her service to the Nymphs who share my shrine, and so we think it proper to take some care of her, too.

There's a young man. His father's well-off, farms a valuable [40] property here. The son's fashionable and lives in town, but he came out hunting with a sporting friend, and happened to come here. I've cast a spell on him, and he's fallen madly in love.

There, that's the outline. Details you'll see in due course, if you like – and please do like. Ah! I think I see our lover coming with his friend; they're busily discussing this very topic.

[Exit PAN into shrine. Enter CHAIREAS and SOSTRATOS right.]

CHAIREAS: *What?* You saw a girl here, a girl from a respectable [50] home, putting garlands on the Nymphs next door, and you fell in love at first sight, Sostratos?

SOSTRATOS: At first sight.

CHAIREAS: That was quick! Or was that your idea when you came out, to fall for a girl?

SOSTRATOS: You think it's funny. But I'm suffering, Chaireas.

CHAIREAS: I believe you.

SOSTRATOS: That's why I've brought you in on it. For I reckon you're a good friend, and a practical man, too.

CHAIREAS: In such matters, Sostratos, my line is this. A friend asks me for help – he's in love with a call-girl. I go straight into action, grab her, carry her off, get drunk, burn the door down, am deaf to [60] all reason. Before even asking her name, the thing to do is to *get* her. Delay increases passion dangerously, but quick action produces quick relief.

But if a friend is talking about marriage and a 'nice' girl, then I take a different line. I check on family, finance and character. For now I'm leaving my friend a permanent record of my professional efficiency.

SOSTRATOS: Great. [*Aside*] But not at all what I want.

CHAIREAS: And now we must hear all about the problem.

SOSTRATOS: As soon as it was light, I sent Pyrrhias my huntsman [70] out.

CHAIREAS: What for?

SOSTRATOS: To speak to the girl's father, or whoever is head of the family.

CHAIREAS: Heavens, you can't mean it!

SOSTRATOS: Yes, it was a mistake. It's not really done to leave a job like that to a servant. But when you're in love, it's not too easy to remember propriety. He's been away for ages, too, I can't think what's keeping him. My instructions were to report straight back home to me, when he'd found how things stood out there.
[80]

[*Enter PYRRHIAS, running as if pursued.*]

PYRRHIAS: Out of the way, look out, everyone scatter! There's a maniac after me, a real maniac.

SOSTRATOS: What on earth, boy –?

PYRRHIAS: Run!

SOSTRATOS: What *is* it?

PYRRHIAS: He's pelting me with lumps of earth, and stones. Oh, it's terrible.

SOSTRATOS: Pelting you? Where the devil are you going?

PYRRHIAS [*stopping and looking round*]: He's not after me any more, perhaps?

SOSTRATOS: He certainly isn't.

PYRRHIAS: Oh, I thought he was.

SOSTRATOS: What on earth are you talking about?

PYRRHIAS: Let's get out of here, please.

SOSTRATOS: Where to?

PYRRHIAS: Away from this door here, as far as possible. He's a real son of pain, a man possessed, a lunatic, living here in this house, the man you sent me to see – oh, it's terrible! I've banged my toes [90] and pretty well broken the lot.

SOSTRATOS: And your errand?

PYRRHIAS: What? He beat me up! This way [*moving towards exit, right*].

SOSTRATOS: This chap's off his head.

PYRRHIAS: It's true, sir, I swear it, on my life. For goodness' sake, keep your eyes open. I can hardly talk, I'm so out of breath.

Well, I knocked at the house door, and asked to see the owner. A miserable old crone answered the door, and from the very spot where I stand speaking to you now, she pointed him out. He was [100] trailing around on that hill there, collecting wild pears – or a real load of trouble for his back.

CHAIREAS: He's in a proper tizz. [*To PYRRHIAS*] So, my friend ...?

PYRRHIAS: Well, I stepped on to his land and made my way towards him. I was still quite a way off, but I wanted to show some courtesy and tact, so I called to him and said, 'I've come to see you, sir, on a business matter. I want to talk to you about something that's to your advantage.' But 'You horrible heathen,' he promptly replied, 'trespassing on *my* land! What's the idea?' And he picks up a lump of earth and lets fly with it, right in my [110] face.

CHAIREAS: The hell he did.

PYRRHIAS: And while I had my eyes shut, muttering 'Well, God damn you', he picks up a stick and sets about me, saying 'Business is it – what business is there between you and me? Don't you know where the public highway is?' And he was shouting at the top of his voice.

CHAIREAS: From what you say, the farmer's a raving lunatic.

PYRRHIAS: To finish my story: I took to my heels, and he ran after me for the better part of two miles, round the hill first, then down here to this wood. And he was slinging clods and stones at me, [120] even his *pears* when he'd nothing else left. He's a proper violent piece of work, a real old heathen. For goodness' sake, move off!

SOSTRATOS: Chicken!

PYRRHIAS: You don't realize the danger. He'll eat us alive.

CHAIREAS [*edging away*]: He seems to be a bit upset at the moment. Put off your visit to him, Sostratos, that's my advice. I assure you that in any sort of business, finding the psychological moment is the secret of success.

PYRRHIAS: Yes, do show some sense.

CHAIREAS: A poor farmer's always a bit touchy – not just this one, [130] but nearly all of them. Tomorrow morning early, I'll go and see him on my own, now that I know where he lives. For the moment, you go home and stay there. It'll be all right. [*Exit CHAIREAS, hurriedly, right.*]

PYRRHIAS: Yes, let's do that.

SOSTRATOS: He was delighted to find an excuse. it was quite clear from the start that he didn't want to come with me, and that he didn't approve at all of my notion of marriage. [*To PYRRHIAS*] But as for you, you devil, God rot you entirely, you sinner.

PYRRHIAS: Why, what have *I* done, sir? [140]

SOSTRATOS: Some damage to property, obviously.

PYRRHIAS: I swear I never touched a thing.

SOSTRATOS: And a man beat you although you were doing no wrong?

PYRRHIAS: Yes, and [*looking to the left*] here he comes. [*Calling to KNEMON*] I'm just off, sir. [*To SOSTRATOS*] *you* talk to him. [*Exit PYRRHIAS, right.*]

SOSTRATOS: Oh, I couldn't. I never convince anyone when I talk. [*Looks to left*] How can one describe a man like this? He doesn't look at all amiable to me, by God he doesn't. And he means business. I'll just move a bit away from the door: that's better. He's actually yelling at the top of his voice, though he's all on his own. I don't think he's right in the head. To tell the truth, I'm afraid of him, [*150*] I really am.

[*Enter KNEMON, left.*]

KNEMON: Well, wasn't Perseus the lucky one, twice over, too. First, he could fly, so he never had to meet any of those who walk the earth: and then he had this marvellous device with which he used to turn anyone who annoyed him into stone. I wish I had it now [*looking at audience*]. There'd be no shortage of stone statues all round here.

Life is becoming intolerable, by God it is. People are actually [*160*] walking on to my land now, and *talking* to me. [*Ironically*] Of course, I'm used to hanging about on the public highway – sure I am! When I don't even work this part of my land any longer, I've abandoned it because of the traffic. But now they're following me up to the tops, hordes of them. Heavens, here's another one, standing right beside the door.

SOSTRATOS [*aside*]: I wonder if he'll hit me?

KNEMON: Privacy – you can't find it anywhere, not even if you want [*170*] to hang yourself.

SOSTRATOS [*addressing him*]: Am I offending you, sir? I'm waiting here for someone, I arranged to meet him.

KNEMON: What did I tell you? Do you and your friends think this is a public walk-way? or Piccadilly Circus?⁷ Sure, make a date to meet at my door, if you want to see someone. Feel free, put up a bench if you want, build yourselves a clubhouse. What I suffer! Sheer impertinence, that's the whole trouble, in my opinion. [*Exit KNEMON into his house.*]

SOSTRATOS: And in *my* opinion, this is going to need a special effort. It'll stretch us to the limit, that's quite clear. Should I go and fetch [180] Getas, my father's man? Yes, I'll do that. He's a real ball of fire, and he's *very* experienced. He'll settle this crabby old chap in no time, see if he doesn't. I don't want any delay, for a good deal can happen in one day. Oh, there's the door, someone's coming out.

[*Enter Knemon's daughter, from Knemon's house, carrying a large jug.*]

GIRL [*not seeing Sostratos*]: Oh, dear! What a catastrophe! It's dreadful! What'll I do now? Nurse was drawing water, and she's dropped [190] the bucket down the well.

SOSTRATOS [*aside*]: God Almighty and all the hosts of heaven, what incomparable beauty!

GIRL: And when Daddy was going out, he told me to have hot water ready.

SOSTRATOS [*to audience*]: Ladies and Gentlemen, what a vision!

GIRL: If he finds out, he'll make mincemeat of her, poor soul. But no time for useless talk! Dearest Nymphs, you must supply our water. But if there's a service going on inside, I don't want to disturb them –

SOSTRATOS [*coming forward*]: If you give the jug to me, I'll fill it and bring it straight back to you. [200]

GIRL: Oh, yes, *please*. And do hurry.

SOSTRATOS [*aside*]: Country girl she may be, but she has pretty manners. Great God, what heavenly power can save me now? [*Goes into shrine.*]

GIRL: Oh! What was that noise? Is Daddy coming? I'll catch it if he finds me out here. [*She moves towards her own door.*]

[*Enter DAOS, from Gorgias's house.*]

DAOS [*talking back over shoulder*]: I've spent a lot of time working for you here, while master's digging all on his own. I've got to go and help him. Damn you, Poverty, why do we have so much of you? Why do you sit inside all the time? Are you never going to leave us? [210]

SOSTRATOS [*emerging from shrine*]: Here's your jug.

GIRL: Over here, please.

DAOS: Now, what does *he* want?

SOSTRATOS [*handing over jug*]: Goodbye, and look after your father. [*Girl goes into house.*] Oh, it's agony! [*Pulling himself together*] Oh, stop whining, Sostratos, it'll

be all right.

DAOS [*aside*]: *What'll be all right?*

SOSTRATOS [*still talking to himself*]: No need to panic. Do what you were going to do just now, go and fetch Getas and lay the whole problem clearly before him. [*Exit SOSTRATOS, right.*]

DAOS: What the devil's going on here? I don't like this at all. A young man doing a girl a service, that's not right. It's your fault, Knemon, damn you. An innocent girl, and you leave her all alone, [220] in a lonely place, with no proper protection. Perhaps this chap knows this, and has slipped in quietly, thinking it's his luck. Well, I'd better tell her brother about this, right away, so that we can look after her. I think I'll go and do that now – I see a carnival crowd coming this way: they're a bit drunk, and it's no moment [230] for me to tangle with them. [*Exit DAOS, left.*]

FIRST CHORAL INTERLUDE

ACT TWO

[*Enter GORGIAS and DAOS, left.*]

GORGIAS: Do you really mean to tell me that you behaved so casually and irresponsibly?

DAOS: What do you mean?

GORGIAS: For heaven's sake, Daos, you should have confronted the chap, whoever he was, the moment he approached the girl, and warned him never to let anyone see him doing that again. Instead, you stood back as if it had nothing to do with you. It really isn't possible to deny the blood tie. I'm still responsible for my sister. [240] Her father wants nothing to do with us, but that's no reason for us to imitate his disagreeable attitude. If she gets into trouble, the disgrace affects me too. For other people have no idea who is to blame, they simply see the result. Come on.

DAOS: But Gorgias, sir, I'm terrified of the old man. If he catches me near his door, he'll string me up on the spot.

GORGIAS: Yes, he's a bit difficult. If you tangle with him, there's no [250] way you can force him to reform, and you can't change his attitude by good advice. Against force – well, he's got the law on his side; and he's naturally resistant to persuasion!

DAOS: Just a minute. Our walk hasn't been wasted. Here comes that chap back again. I told you so!

GORGIAS: The one with the smart city cloak? That the one you mean?

DAOS: Yes, indeed.

GORGIAS: A right rogue, too, from the look in his eye.

[*Enter SOSTRATOS, right, not seeing the others.*]

SOSTRATOS: Getas wasn't at home when I called. My mother's planning to sacrifice to some god or other – no idea which – she [260] does this every day, trailing round the whole district, making offerings, and she'd sent Getas out to hire a

cook, locally. Well, I've waved goodbye to the religious bit, and come back to business here. I've decided to cut out all this traipsing about, and do my own talking for myself. I'll knock on the door: that'll stop any further debate.

GORGAS [*coming forward*]: Young sir, may I give you a word of quite serious advice?

SOSTRATOS [*startled, but amiable*]: Yes, of course. What is it? [270]

GORGAS [*earnestly*]: In my view, all men, be they rich or poor, eventually reach a point where their luck stops or changes. The successful man continues to prosper and flourish only as long as he can accept his good fortune without harming others. But, come the point where his prosperity entices him to commit a crime, then, in my opinion, he takes a turn for the worse. While the needy, provided that in their necessity they keep clear of crime, [280] and accept their poverty like honest men, come in due course into credit, and can expect their shares in life to improve. Let me put it this way: if you're well-endowed with worldly goods, don't rely on them too much, and don't despise us because we're poor. Let everyone see that you deserve your prosperity to last.

SOSTRATOS: You think that at the moment I'm stepping a bit out of line?

GORGAS: I think you've set your heart on doing something quite disgraceful. Your idea is to seduce an innocent girl – a respectable [290] man's daughter, too – or you're watching your chance to do something that deserves the death-sentence, several times over.

SOSTRATOS: Help!

GORGAS: It's not fair that you, with time on your hands, should plague us who have none. And let me tell you, when a poor man's wronged, he becomes a very difficult customer. To start with, he gets a lot of sympathy: and then he takes his bad treatment not just as an injury, but as a personal insult.

SOSTRATOS: Young man, please let me speak for a moment too.

DAOS [*to GORGAS*]: That's fair, sir, it really is. [300]

SOSTRATOS: *You're* pontificating without knowing the facts. I saw a girl here, and I've fallen in love with her. If that's the 'crime' you're talking about, then perhaps I'm guilty. There's nothing more to say, except that I'm not here after *her* – it's her father I want to see. I'm a free man, I have a reasonable income, I'm ready to marry her without a dowry, and I swear always to love and cherish her. If I've come here with any criminal purpose, or with any idea of plotting [310] mischief

against you, may Pan here, sir, and the Nymphs strike me dead right here, beside the house. And let me tell *you*, if that's your idea of me, I don't like it at all!

GORGAS: Well, if I spoke a bit strongly, forget it now. You've convinced me completely, and I'm on your side. I'm an interested party. I'm the girl's half-brother, my friend, and that's why I can speak like this.

SOSTRATOS: Then you can certainly help with the next move. [320]

GORGAS: How?

SOSTRATOS: I can see you're a good-natured chap –

GORGAS: I don't want to fob you off with empty excuses: but face facts. The girl's father is an oddity – no one like him, past or present.

SOSTRATOS: Oh, the chap with the temper! I think I know him.

GORGAS: He's trouble: and more than trouble. His property here is really a very decent one,⁸ but he persists in farming it all by himself. He won't have any help – no farm servant, no locally hired [330] labour, no neighbour to lend a hand; just himself alone. His chief pleasure is never to set eyes on another human being. Mostly he works with his daughter beside him – she's the only one he talks to, never an easy word to anyone else. And he says he'll only let her marry when he finds a husband of his own kidney.

SOSTRATOS [*gloomily*]: That means never.

GORGAS: So don't put yourself to any trouble, my friend. It'll be useless. Leave us to cope with this. We're family, it's our job. [340]

SOSTRATOS: For heaven's sake, have you never been in love?

GORGAS: I can't be, my friend.

SOSTRATOS: Why? What's to stop you?

GORGAS: Simple arithmetic. I count up my troubles. There's no time at all for anything else.

SOSTRATOS: Yes, I can see you *haven't* been in love. What you say on the subject certainly suggests lack of experience. You tell me to give up. But that's no longer in my hands, it's in God's.

GORGAS: Well, you're doing us no harm, but *you're* suffering to no good purpose.

SOSTRATOS: Not if I get the girl.

GORGAS: You won't get her. But you can come with me and ask. [350] He works the field next to mine.

SOSTRATOS: How'll we do it?

GORGAS: I'll bring up the subject of the girl's marriage. It's something I'd be glad to see settled. He'll promptly find fault with everyone, and fulminate against the way they live. And if he sees you looking elegant and idle, he won't stand the sight of you.

SOSTRATOS: Is he there now?

GORGAS: No, but he'll soon be going out. This is the way he always goes.

SOSTRATOS [*eagerly*]: Taking the girl with him, you mean?

GORGAS: Maybe. Maybe not. [360]

SOSTRATOS: Lead on, then! I'm ready.

GORGAS: What a suggestion!

SOSTRATOS: Please, be my friend.

GORGAS: How?

SOSTRATOS: I'll tell you how. Let's go ahead to the place you mean.

GORGAS: Then what? Are you going to stand there, in your smart cloak, while we work away?

SOSTRATOS: Why not?

GORGAS: Because he'll throw his sods at you right away, and call you a lazy devil.

You'll have to do some digging along with us. If he sees that he might, just might, be prepared to listen even to you, if he thought you were a poor farmer.

SOSTRATOS: I'll do anything you say. Lead on. [370]

GORGAS: Why inflict pain on yourself?

DAOS [*aside*]: What *I* want is for us to get as much as possible done today – and for *him* to get lumbago and stop coming here and bothering us.

SOSTRATOS: Give me a mattock, then.

DAOS: Here, take mine and get on with it. While you do that, I'll be building up the wall. That's got to be done too.

SOSTRATOS: Give it here. You've saved my life.

DAOS [*to GORGAS*]: I'm off, sir. You two come on after me [*Exit DAOS, left.*]

SOSTRATOS: Well, here we go. I must either win the girl and live, or die in the attempt.

GORGAS: If you really mean it, good luck! [380]

SOSTRATOS: Heavens, man, you think you're putting me off, but everything you say is making me twice as enthusiastic for the job. If the girl hasn't grown up among a pack of women and so knows nothing of 'life's miseries', has had no frightening stories from aunt or nurse, but has been pretty properly brought up by a fierce father who's naturally against all vice – then surely it's bliss to win her? [*He lifts the mattock and staggers*] Help! This must weigh a couple of hundredweight. It'll do for me before I've done [390] with it. Still, best foot forward, now that I've started on the job. [SOSTRATOS and GORGIAS go off left.]

[Enter SIKON *the cook, right, dragging a sheep.*]

SIKON: This sheep's a real beauty. Oh, the Hell with it. If I lift it up and carry it on my shoulders, it catches the young shoots of fig trees in its mouth and gobbles up the leaves, struggling and straining away from me. But if it's put on the ground, it refuses to move. Here's a paradox: I'm the cook, but I'm the one being turned into mincemeat hauling this creature along the road. Thank God! Here's the Nymphs' shrine where we're to sacrifice. Good [400] day, Pan. [*Shouts*] Hey, Getas! Hurry up!

[Enter GETAS, right, staggering under a load of rugs, pots, pans and batterie de cuisine.]

GETAS: A four-donkey load, that's what these blasted women tied up for me to carry.

SIKON: Looks like lots of company expected. What a fantastic number of rugs you've got there.

GETAS: Where shall I –

SIKON: Pile them here.

GETAS [*dropping the lot*]: There! If the next dream is about Pan of Paiania,⁹ off we'll go on a twenty-mile trot, to sacrifice to *him*. I know.

SIKON [*sharply*]: Dream? Whose dream?

GETAS: Don't snap at me, my friend.

SIKON: But, Getas, tell me who had the dream. [410]

GETAS: Mistress.

SIKON: And what on earth *was* the dream?

GETAS: You'll be the death of me. She thought that Pan –

SIKON: You mean *this* Pan?

GETAS: This very one.

SIKON: What was he doing?

GETAS: He'd got young master, Sostratos-

SIKON: He's quite a lad!

GETAS: And he was putting fetters on him.

SIKON: Help!

GETAS: Then he was giving him a leather jacket and a mattock, and telling him to dig on the land next door there.

SIKON: How peculiar.

GETAS: Well, that's why we're sacrificing, to make sure this frightful dream has a happy ending.

SIKON: I see. Now, pick up all this stuff again and take it inside. Let's get the couches properly arranged, and everything organized. I [420] want nothing to hold up the sacrifice once they arrive. Good luck to it! And take that scowl off your face, you old misery. I'll feed you lip properly today.

GETAS: I've always been a great admirer of you and of your art, [*aside*] but I don't trust you an inch! [*Exeunt SIKON and GETAS into the shrine.*]

SECOND CHORAL INTERLUDE

ACT THREE

[*Enter KNEMON from his house, speaking back over his shoulder.*]

KNEMON: Lock the door, woman, and don't open it for *anyone*, until I get back. It'll be quite dark by then, I expect. [*He moves off towards left.*]

[*Enter Sostratos' MOTHER and party, right.*]

MOTHER: Do get a move on, Plangon.¹⁰ We should have *finished* the [430] sacrifice by now.

KNEMON: What the devil's all this about? Oh, Hell! Hordes of people ...

MOTHER: Parthenis, pipe pan's tune. One shouldn't, they say, approach this god in silence.

[*Enter GETAS, from shrine.*]

GETAS: So you finally got here.

KNEMON: Oh, God, how disgusting.

GETAS: We've been hanging around waiting for you for ages.

MOTHER: Is everything ready?

GETAS: Of course. The sheep at any rate can't await your convenience. It's pretty well dead already, poor thing.

MOTHER [*to attendants*]: Come on, inside! Get baskets, water, offerings [440] ready.

GETAS [*to KNEMON*]: And what are *you* gaping at, hophead?

[*Exeunt MOTHER, GETAS and party into shrine.*]

KNEMON: Damn and blast them! They're stopping me from working – I can't leave this house unprotected. I tell you, Nymphs next door are a perpetual nuisance. I think I'll knock the house down, and build another one somewhere else. And look at the way they sacrifice, the devils. They bring hampers and bottles of wine, not for the gods' benefit – oh, no – for their own. Piety extends as far as the incense and the cake: that's all put on the fire, so the god can [450] have *that*. They allow the gods the tail-end, too, and the gallbladder – they're not edible. But everything else they polish off themselves. [*knocks at his door*] Woman!

Open the door, quick. I suppose I'll just have to work indoors today. [*The door opens and KNEMON goes in.*]

[*Enter GETAS from shrine, talking back over his shoulder.*]

GETAS: You've forgotten the *pot*, you tell me? You're all dopey from a hangover!

What're we going to do now? Have to bother the god's neighbours, I suppose. [*He knocks at Knemon's door*] Door! Honestly, I can't imagine a more useless set of girls anywhere. Door! [460] Nothing in their heads but sex. Door, *please*! And then lies, if anyone catches them at it. Do-or! What the devil's wrong here?

DOOR! Not a soul at home. Uh-uh, I think someone's coming now, running like mad.

KNEMON [*opening door*]: Why are you plastered to my door, you miserable trash?

Tell me that!

GETAS: No need to bite my nose off.

KNEMON: I'll do that, by God I will, and eat you up alive, too.

GETAS: Oh, please don't.

KNEMON: Is there any contract, you godless rubbish, between you and me?

GETAS: Contract? No. But I haven't come to demand payment of a [470] debt, or to serve a summons. I only want to borrow a pot.

KNEMON: A *pot*?

GETAS: A pot.

KNEMON: Damn you, do you think I'm a sacrificer of bulls, like you lot?

GETAS: I Shouldn't expect you to sacrifice as much as a snail. And a very good day to you, sir. [*Turns away*] The women told me to knock at the door and ask. Well, I've done that. No pot. I'll go back and tell them. This chap's a real old viper. [*He goes into the shrine.*] [480]

KNEMON: Man-eating tigers, that's what they are: blithely knock as if they knew us.

If I catch anyone near our door, and don't make an example of him for all the neighbourhood to see, you [*to audience*] may take me for a real old Johnny Raw. This chap, whoever he was, was lucky to get away. [*He goes hack into his house.*]

[*Enter SIKON from shrine, talking back over his shoulder.*]

SIKON: Damn you! Insulted you, did he? Perhaps your request was made without delicacy. Some people have no idea how to do a thing like this. *I've* found the art of it. I cater for thousands in [490] Athens, *and* I bother their neighbours and

borrow pots from them all. You need a soft approach when you want a favour. An older chap answers the door: I promptly address him as ‘Father’ or ‘Dad’. If it’s an old woman, then ‘Ma’. If it’s a middle-aged woman, I call her ‘Madam’. If a youngish servant, then ‘My dear chap’. You all deserve to be strung up. Such ignorance! ‘Door, door!’ indeed. Now, *my* line is ‘Come on, Dad, you’re just the man I want!’ [*He knocks at the door.*]

KNEMON [*opening the door*]: You back again?

SIKON: Goodness, what’s this?

KNEMON: You’re annoying me on purpose, I think. Haven’t I told [500] you not to come near my door? [*Shouts*] Woman, bring my strap.

[*She does so, and he beats SIKON*]

SIKON: Oh no, let me go.

KNEMON: Let you *go*?

SIKON: Yes, sir, *please*. [*He breaks free and runs away from KNEMON.*]

KNEMON: Come back here.

SIKON: God send you –

KNEMON: *Still* talking?

SIKON: I only came to borrow a cook-pan.

KNEMON: I haven’t got one – no cook-pan, no chopper, no salt, no vinegar, nothing.

I’ve simply told everyone in the neighbourhood to keep away from me.

SIKON: You didn’t tell me.

KNEMON: Well, I’m telling you now.

SIKON: Yes, worse luck. [*Wheedling*] Couldn’t you tell me, please, [510] where a man could go and get a pan?

KNEMON: Still nattering away? Don’t say I didn’t warn you!

SIKON: A very good day to you.

KNEMON: I don’t want a good day from any of you.

SIKON: Bad day, then.

KNEMON [*going into house*]: This is intolerable!

SIKON [*rubbing his shoulders*]: He’s given me a pretty pounding. ‘There are ways and ways of asking a favour’ – and a fat lot of difference it makes here! [*Ponders*] Try another house? But if they’re so quick to start a punch-up here, that makes it

difficult. Perhaps better *roast* the meat? Yes, I think so. And I do have a casserole dish. Be blowed to the locals! I'll use what I've got. [*Goes [520] into the shrine.*]

[*Enter SOSTRATOS, left, limping badly.*]

SOSTRATOS: Anyone who's short of trouble should come to Phyle for the hunting.

Oh, I'm sore! The small of my back, all my back, my neck, my whole body!

[*Addresses audience*] You see, I went hard at it at once, quite the young enthusiast, swinging the mattock right up then driving it down deep, working like a navvy. I went hard at it, a short, sharp burst. Then I kept turning round, to see when the old man might be coming, with the girl. And that was [530] precisely when I began to rub my lumbar muscles – furtively at first, but as all this went on for hours and hours, I started to straighten up, and I went stiff as a plank. Not a soul arrived on the scene. The sun was baking hot, and when Gorgias looked over, he'd see me working away like a well-beam, struggling up then slumping straight down again, absolutely rigid. 'I don't think he'll come now, my friend,' he said. And I promptly replied 'So what do we do now? Look for him tomorrow and call it a day now?' (For [540] Daos had arrived to take over the digging.)

Well, that's how the first assault fared. I've come back here, I honestly can't tell you why, but something draws me spontaneously to the place.

[*Enter GETAS from shrine, talking back over his shoulder and rubbing his eyes.*]

GETAS: What the devil? Do you think I've got thirty pairs of hands, man? I get the charcoal glowing for you, fetch, carry, clean, cut up the offal, make the meal-cakes, bring round 'this here', see to 'that there'¹¹ – all the time quite blind with the smoke. Oh, I'm having a [550] marvellous holiday!

SOSTRATOS: Hey, Getas!

GETAS: Who wants me now?

SOSTRATOS: I do.

GETAS: And who are you?

SOSTRATOS: Open your eyes.

GETAS: Oh, I see. It's young master.

SOSTRATOS: What are you all doing here?

GETAS: Why, we've just finished the sacrifice, and now we're getting lunch ready.

SOSTRATOS: Mother here?

GETAS: Ages ago.

SOSTRATOS: And Father?

GETAS: We expect him any minute. Do come in.

SOSTRATOS: Yes, when I've done a little errand. In a way, the sacrifice here is quite convenient. I'll go just as I am and invite the young man here, and his servant, to join us. For if they share in [560] the sacrifice, they'll be more inclined to support my wedding plans in the future.

GETAS: Oh? You're going off to invite people to lunch? As far as I'm concerned, they can come in their thousands. I realized a long time ago that not a bite would come my way. Fat chance. Bring the whole world, do. You've sacrificed a *fine* sheep, a *real* joy to behold. These are all very fine ladies, but would they share anything with me? Not on your life: not as much as a pinch of cooking salt.

SOSTRATOS: It'll be all right today, Getas – I'll play the prophet on [570] that myself, Pan, though I also pray as I always do when I pass you – and I'll be generous. [*He goes off, left.*]

[*Enter SIMICHE from Knemon's house.*]

SIMICHE: Oh calamity, calamity, calamity!

GETAS: Oh, Hell! Here's the old man's woman.

SIMICHE: What's to become of me? I wanted to get the bucket out of the well, if I could, by myself, without telling master; so I tied the mattock to a poor rotten old piece of rope, and it promptly broke [580] on me.

GETAS [*aside*]: Oh, great!

SIMICHE: Oh, dear! Now I've dropped the mattock into the well too, as well as the bucket.

GETAS [*aside*]: Then all that's left is to throw yourself in after them.

SIMICHE: Unfortunately, he wanted to shift some dung that was lying in the yard, and he's been running round for ages looking for the mattock, and yelling – oh, there's the door: here he comes.

GETAS: Run, run, poor woman, he'll kill you. No, better stand up to him.

KNEMON [*rushing out of his house*]: Where's the culprit?

SIMICHE: I didn't mean to do it, sir, it slipped out of my hand.

KNEMON: Inside, you.

SIMICHE: Oh, what are you going to do? [590]

KNEMON: Let *you* down, on a rope.

SIMICHE: Oh, please don't!

KNEMON: On this very same rope too, I assure you.

GETAS [*aside*]: Just the job, if it's really rotten.

SIMICHE: I'll get Daos, shall I, from next door?

KNEMON: Get Daos, you infidel, when you've ruined me? Don't you hear me? Inside, you, at the double. [*She goes in.*] Oh dear, oh dear, I'm all alone now, not a soul to help. *I'll* go down the well, nothing else for it.

GETAS: We could give you a rope and grapple.

KNEMON: Damn you to all eternity, if you speak a word to me. [*Goes [600] in.*]

GETAS: And I'd deserve it, too. He's gone rushing in again. Poor man, what a life he leads. That's your genuine Attic farmer. He struggles with stony soil that grows thyme and sage, getting a good deal of pain and no profit. Oh, here comes young master with his guests. Local farm-labourers they are. How peculiar. Why is he bringing them here now, and how did he get to know [610] them?

SOSTRATOS [*entering left with GORGIAS and DAOS*]: I simply won't take no for an answer. We have masses of food. Surely to goodness no one refuses an invitation to lunch after a friend has been sacrificing? For your friend I've been, I assure you, for ages before we met. Here, Daos, take these tools inside, and then come and join us.

GORGIAS: Don't under any circumstances leave my mother alone in the house, Daos. See that she has all she needs. I won't be long. [*SOSTRATOS, GORGIAS and GETAS go into the shrine, and DAOS into Gorgias's house.*.]

THIRD CHORAL INTERLUDE

ACT FOUR

[*Enter SIMICHE, from Knemon's house.*]

SIMICHE: Help! Oh, dear. Help! [620]

SIKON [*entering from shrine*]: Dammit! In the name of all the powers of heaven, let us get on with our drink-offering. You insult us, you hit us – the hell with you! What an extraordinary establishment!

SIMICHE: Master's down the well.

SIKON: How come?

SIMICHE: He was going down to get the mattock and bucket, and he slipped at the top, and he's fallen in.

SIKON: Not Old Cantankerous here? *He's* got what he deserved, all right! My dear good woman, it's up to you now.

SIMICHE: How? [630]

SIKON: Take a heavy basin, or a rock, or something like that, and heave it down on top of him.

SIMICHE: Oh, *please* go down.

SIKON: Good God! Me? To struggle with a dog in the well, like the man in the story?¹² Not on your life!

SIMICHE: Oh, where on earth is Gorgias?

GORGAS [*entering from shrine*]: Who, me? What's the matter, Simiche?

SIMICHE: I tell you again, Master's down the well.

GORGAS [*calling*]: Sostratos, here a minute! [*SOSTRATOS enters from shrine.*]

Simiche, lead the way, inside, quick. [*They go into Knemon's house.*]

SIKON: There *is* a God, there really is! You wouldn't lend a cook-pan to worshippers, you miserly old heathen. Now that you've fallen [640] in, drink the well dry, and then you won't have a drop of water to offer anyone either. Now the Nymphs have given me my revenge – quite right too. No one does down a cook and gets off scot-free. There's something sacrosanct about our profession (but you can

treat a *waiter* any way you like). [*There is a cry from inside.*] He's not *dead*, is he? 'Daddy, oh darling Daddy' a girl's weeping and wailing.

Several lines of the text are damaged here, but from the words that survive, it is clear that Sikon is envisaging the rescue operation, which will produce Knemon ...

... soaked to the skin and shivering. Lovely! I'd love to see it, by God I would. [*Shouts into the shrine*] Pour an offering to help them, [660] ladies. Pray that the old man's rescue may be – bungled, so that he's damaged, crippled. That would make him a much less aggravating neighbour to the god here, and to all who come to worship him. It matters to me, too, if I'm ever hired for the job. [*Goes into shrine.*]

[*Enter SOSTRATOS, from Knemon's house.*]

SOSTRATOS [*addressing audience*]: My friends, by all the gods of heaven I swear, I have never in my whole life seen a man so conveniently half-drowned. That episode was a delight! As soon as we got there, Gorgias jumped straight down into the well, and the [670] girl and I did nothing in particular up top. Well, what *could* we do? Except that she was tearing her hair, crying and pounding away at her breast, and I was standing there like a nanny – I really was, and a fine fool I looked – pleading with her to stop it, worshipping at her shrine and feasting my eyes on a perfect picture. For the victim down below I cared less than nothing, except for trying all the time to haul him up – that did inconvenience me a bit! And I tell you, I [680] very nearly did for him. For as I gazed into the girl's eyes, I let the rope go, two or three times. But Gorgias was a veritable Atlas: he kept a grip on him and eventually, with considerable difficulty, got him up.

When he was safely out, I came out, and here I am. I couldn't control myself any longer – I very nearly went up to the girl and kissed her. That's how madly in love I am. I'm preparing the ground – but the door's opening. God in heaven, look at that! [690]

[*KNEMON is wheeled out on a couch, GORGAS and the GIRL with him.*]

GORGAS: Can I do anything for you, sir? You only have to ask.

KNEMON: Oh, I'm in a very bad way.

GORGAS: Cheer up!

KNEMON: Don't worry, Knemon will never trouble any of you again, ever.

GORGAS: Look, this is the kind of thing that happens when you live like a hermit. You came very close to death just now. A man of your age should end his days with someone to look after him.

KNEMON: I know I'm in a bad way, Gorgias. Ask your mother to come, tell her it's urgent. We only learn from bitter experience, it [700] seems. Little daughter, please help me to sit up.

SOSTRATOS [*viewing process*]: Lucky fellow!

KNEMON [*to SOSTRATOS*]: Why are you hanging about there, you miserable man?

Several lines are missing here, but it is clear that Gorgias has fetched Myrrhine, and that Knemon has begun his great speech.

KNEMON: ... and not one of you could change my views on that, [710] make up your minds to it. One mistake I did perhaps make, in thinking that I could be completely self-sufficient, and would never need anyone's assistance. Now that I've seen how sudden and unexpected death can be, I realize I was stupid to take that line. You always need to have – and to have handy – someone to help you. When I saw how people lived, calculating everything for profit, I swear I grew cynical, and I never even imagined that any [720] man would ever do a disinterested kindness to another.

I was wrong. By his noble efforts Gorgias, all by himself, has managed to demonstrate that. I never let him come near my door, never did him the slightest service, never said 'good morning' or gave him a kind word. And yet he's saved my life. Another man might (with some justification) have said 'You don't let me come near you; *I'm* keeping well away. You've never done anything for my family: I'm doing nothing for you now.' [*To GORGAS, who is looking embarrassed*] What's the matter, boy? Whether I die now (which seems only too likely, I'm not at all well), or whether I live, [730] I'm adopting you as my son, and anything I have, consider it all your own. My daughter here I entrust to your care. Find her a husband. Even if I make a complete recovery, I won't be able to do that, for I'll never find anyone I approve of. *If* I live, leave me to live my own life, but take over and manage everything else.

You've got some sense, thank God, and you're your sister's natural protector. Divide my property, give half for her dowry, and use the other half to provide for her mother and myself. [*To his daughter*] Lay me down again,

my dear. I don't think a man should [740] ever say more than is strictly necessary, so I'll add only this, my child: I want to tell you a little about myself and my ways. If everyone was like me, there'd be no law-suits or dragging one another off to gaol, and no wars: everyone would be satisfied with a moderate competence. But you may like things better as they are. Then live that way.

The cantankerous and bad-tempered old man won't stop you.

GORGAS: I accept all that. But, with your assistance, we must find a husband for the girl without delay, if you agree.

KNEMON: Look, I've told you my intentions. Leave me alone, for [750] goodness' sake.

GORGAS: Someone wants a word with you –

KNEMON: For God's sake, NO!

GORGAS: ... to ask for your daughter's hand in marriage.

KNEMON: I've no further concern with that.

GORGAS: But it's the man who helped to rescue you.

KNEMON: Who?

GORGAS: He's here. Come on, Sostratos.

KNEMON: He's certainly been in the sun. A farmer, is he?

GORGAS: Yes, and a good one, Father. He's not soft, not the kind that strolls idly round all day.

In two badly damaged lines, Knemon probably gives his consent to the marriage.

KNEMON: Wheel me in. You see to him. And look after your sister. [*He is wheeled into his house.*]

GORGAS: You'd better consult your family about this, Sostratos. [760]

SOSTRATOS: My father will make no difficulties.

GORGAS [*formally*]: Then I betroth her to you, Sostratos, giving her to you in the sight of heaven, as is right and proper. You've been frank and straightforward in approaching the business, without any deceit in your courtship. And you were ready to do anything to win the girl. You've lived soft, but you took a mattock and dug the land, you were willing to *work*. A man really proves his true worth when, although he's well-off, he's ready to treat a poor man as his equal. A man

like that will bear any change of fortune with a good grace. You've given adequate proof of your character. Just [770] stay that way!

SOSTRATOS: In fact, I hope to improve. But self-praise is a bit boring. Oh, good, here's my father.

GORGAS: Is Kallipides your father?

SOSTRATOS: Indeed he is.

GORGAS: A very rich man – and he deserves it, he's a very good farmer.

[*Enter KALLIPIDES, right.*]

KALLIPIDES: Perhaps I'm too late. The others may have devoured the sheep and gone back to the farm long ago.

GORGAS: Goodness, he seems to be starving. Shall we break the news to him now?

SOSTRATOS: No, let him eat first. He'll be in a better mood then.

KALLIPIDES: Well, Sostratos? Lunch over?

SOSTRATOS: Yes, but we've kept some for you. Go on in.

KALLIPIDES: That's just what I'm doing [*Goes into shrine.*] [780]

GORGAS: Now's your chance. Go in, and you can talk to your father on your own, if you want to.

SOSTRATOS: You'll wait inside, won't you?

GORGAS: I won't set foot outside the house.

SOSTRATOS: Then I'll fetch you shortly.

[SOSTRATOS *goes into the shrine*, and GORGAS, MYRRHINE and the GIRL *go into Knemon's house.*]

FOURTH CHORAL INTERLUDE

ACT FIVE

[*Enter SOSTRATOS and KALLIPIDES, from shrine.*]

SOSTRATOS: You're not doing all that I wanted, Father. I expected better of you.

KALLIPIDES: But I've given my consent! I'm quite willing for you to marry the girl you love – in fact, I say you must.

SOSTRATOS: That's not the way it looks to me.

KALLIPIDES: For heaven's sake! I don't need to be told that a young man's marriage is more stable if it's love that prompts him into [790] it.

SOSTRATOS: SO, *I* can marry the young man's sister and reckon that he's no disgrace to our family. Then how can you refuse to let him marry *my* sister?

KALLIPIDES: That's no good. I've no desire to acquire *two* beggars-in-law at one go. One's quite enough for us.

SOSTRATOS: You're talking about money, a very unstable substance. If you're sure it will stay with you for ever, then be careful never to share what you have with anyone. But when you're not [800] the absolute owner, when you hold everything on a lease from Fortune, then don't grudge a man a share of it, Father. For Fortune may take it all from you and bestow it on another, perhaps less deserving, person. That's why I tell you, Father, that while you have control of it, you should use it generously, help everyone, and by your actions enrich as many people as possible. Such generosity never dies, and if ever *you* have a fall, it will ensure the same generosity for you in turn. A real friend is much better [810] value than secret wealth, kept buried somewhere.

KALLIPIDES: You know me, Sostratos. The money I've made I shan't bury with me – what's the point? It's yours. You've found a friend and want to keep him. Go ahead, and good luck to you. No need to preach at me. Off with you! Hand it over, share it. You've quite convinced me, and I'm perfectly happy about it.

SOSTRATOS: Perfectly?

KALLIPIDES: Absolutely. Don't worry about it.

SOSTRATOS: Then I'll call Gorgias. [820]

GORGAS [*entering from Knemon's house*]: I heard all your conversation, right from the beginning, from the doorway on my way out. Well, now: I accept you as a good friend, Sostratos, and I'm remarkably fond of you. But I don't want to take on anything that's beyond me, and I assure you that, even if I wanted to, I couldn't do it.

SOSTRATOS: I don't understand.

GORGAS: My sister I give you to be your wife. But for me to marry *your* sister – thank you, but –

SOSTRATOS: You're *refusing*?

GORGAS: I'd get no pleasure from living a soft life on the proceeds of [830] other people's hard work. I prefer what I've earned myself.

SOSTRATOS: Nonsense, Gorgias! You're saying you're not worthy of the match.

GORGAS: I reckon that *personally* I'm a worthy match for her. But it's not right to accept a fortune when one has so little.

The next few lines are badly damaged and what follows is at best an approximation of the sense.

KALLIPIDES: That's an honourable answer. But you're a bit inconsistent.

GORGAS: How?

KALLIPIDES: You're a poor man – and you want to give the impression of liking it. You've seen me convinced. Please agree.

GORGAS: That settles it! I'd be doubly deficient, in mind as well as in means, to refuse the one man who offers me a solution to my [840] troubles.

SOSTRATOS: Then it only remains to formalize the engagement.

KALLIPIDES: I now betroth my daughter to you, young man, for the procreation of legitimate children, and I give you with her a dowry of £ 30,000.

GORGAS: And I have £10,000 for the other girl.

KALLIPIDES: *Do* you? Don't overstretch yourself.

GORGAS: Well, I have the farm.

KALLIPIDES: Keep it for yourself, Gorgias. Now, go and bring your mother and sister here, to join our womenfolk.

GORGAS: I'll do that.

SOSTRATOS: We'll all stay here tonight for a party, and have the [850] weddings tomorrow. And bring the old man with you, Gorgias. Perhaps he'll get better treatment here with us.

GORGAS: He won't want to come, Sostratos.

SOSTRATOS: Persuade him.

GORGAS: I'll try. [*He goes into Knemon's house.*]

SOSTRATOS: We must have a fine drinks party now, Dad, and the women must make a night of it too.

KALLIPIDES: Don't you believe it! *They'll* do the drinking, and we'll certainly do the night work. I'll go and organize everything properly for you. [*He goes into the shrine.*]

SOSTRATOS: Do that. [*To audience*] A sensible man should never [860] completely despair about anything. There's nothing that can't be achieved by concentration and hard work. I'm a living example of this truth! In one single day I've achieved a marriage that no one would ever have thought possible.

[*Enter GORGAS with his MOTHER and the GIRL, from Knemon's house.*]

GORGAS: Come on now, hurry up.

SOSTRATOS: This way, ladies. [*Calling*] Mother, here are your guests. [*To GORGAS*] Knemon not here yet?

GORGAS: *Knemon*? Why, he begged me to bring the old servant woman too, so that he could be absolutely on his own.

SOSTRATOS: He's a hopeless case.

GORGAS: That's how he is.

SOSTRATOS: Well, forget him. Let's go in. [870]

GORGAS: Sostratos, I'm shy with women in the same –

SOSTRATOS: Nonsense! In with you! Remember, we're all *family* now.

[*They go into the shrine, and SIMICHE enters from Knemon's house, talking over her shoulder.*]

SIMICHE: I'll go too, by God I will. You can lie there all on your own. You're a real misery. They wanted to take you to the shrine, but you wouldn't go. Something awful will happen to you, you mark my words, something much worse than you're suffering now.

GETAS [*entering from shrine*]: I'll go and have a look. [*A flautist¹³ starts playing*]
Hey, what do you mean by fluting at me, you blasted [880] nuisance? I'm not ready for you yet, I'm ordered out here to visit the sick. Stop that! [*The music stops.*]

SIMICHE: One of your lot can go and sit with him. *I'm* sending my young lady off to her wedding, and I want a word with her. I want to talk to her, and say goodbye.

GETAS: Quite right. In you go. I'll look after *him* while you're away. [*SIMICHE goes into the shrine.*] I've been plotting for ages for a chance like this, but I had to work at it. And I may not be able to do it yet. [*Calls*] Hey, cook! Sikon! Out here to me, and hurry up. [*Rubbing hands in glee*] Boy oh boy, I think we have some real fun here.

[*Enter SIKON from shrine.*]

SIKON [*slightly drunk, and pompous*]: You want me? [890]

GETAS: Yes, I do. Do you want to get your own back for your recent – er – experience?

SIKON: My recent *experience*? Bugger you, don't start that.

GETAS: The old terror's asleep, all by himself.

SIKON: And how is he?

GETAS: Not too bad.

SIKON: He couldn't get up and hit us?

GETAS: He couldn't even get *up*, I reckon.

SIKON: Oh, boy. I'll go in and ask the loan of something. He'll do his nut!

GETAS [*suddenly inspired*]: Look, suppose we haul him out first, put him here, and *then* knock at the door and make our 'requests', really infuriate him? That'll be fun, I tell you.

SIKON: But what about Gorgias? I'm a bit scared he might catch us [900] and wallop us.

GETAS: There's a great din inside at the party. No one will hear a thing. It is positively our duty to civilize this chap. For we're related to him, now that the families are connected, and if he's always going to be like this, it'll be a job to put up with him, I tell you.

SIKON: Just take care that no one sees you bringing him out here.

GETAS: You go, then.

SIKON: Right. Hang on a minute, don't slope off and leave me to it.

[SIKON goes into Knemon's house, and emerges carrying KNEMON.]

GETAS: No noise, for heaven's sake.

SIKON: I'm not *making* a noise, for earth's sake.

GETAS: Over to the right.

SIKON: There.

GETAS: Put him here. Now for the crunch.

SIKON: Right. I'll go first. Now [*to flautist*] you watch the beat. [*He [910] knocks rhythmically at Knemon's door*] Door! Do-or! Door, please! Door! DOOR!

KNEMON [*wakening*]: Oh, this is murder.

SIKON [*still knocking*]: Door, please! Door! Do-or! Door! DOOR!

KNEMON: Oh, this is murder.

SIKON [*turning round*]: Who's this? You from this house?

KNEMON: Of course I am. What do you want?

SIKON: Cook-pans and a basin, please.

KNEMON: Help me up, someone!

SIKON: You have them, you really have. And I'd like seven winetables and twelve dinner-tables. Hey, boys! Tell the staff inside. I'm in a hurry.

KNEMON: I haven't any of these things.

SIKON: Haven't *any*?

KNEMON: I've told you so a thousand times.

SIKON: I'm off, then. [*Moves across stage.*]

KNEMON: Oh, dear, how did I get here? Who put me down in front [920] of the house? [*To GETAS*] You be off, too!

GETAS: Oh, sure. [*Knocks at door*] Boy! Boyo! Maids! Men! Porter!

KNEMON: You're mad, fellow. You'll knock the door down.

GETAS: Nine rugs, please.

KNEMON: Impossible!

GETAS: And an oriental hanging, brocaded, a hundred feet long.

KNEMON: I wish I had – my strap. Woman! Simiche! Damn and blast the lot of you.

[SIKON comes forward] What do *you* want?

SIKON: A mixing bowl, a big bronze one.

KNEMON: Oh, help me up, someone!

GETAS: You've got the hanging, you know you have, Pa, Pappy. [930]

KNEMON: I haven't the bowl, either. Oh, I'll murder that Simiche.

SIKON: Sit down and shut up. You hate company, you loathe the ladies, you refuse to join the party. You'll have to put up with all this, there's no one here to help you. Grind your teeth there, and listen to my tale.¹⁴ When your wife and daughter arrived, first there were embraces and kisses. They were having a pleasant time, and a little way off, I was getting the drinks ready for the men. [940] They – are you listening? Don't go to sleep!

GETAS: No, indeed.

KNEMON [*groaning*]: Oh, oh!

SIKON: Don't you want to be involved? Listen to the rest of the story. The libation was ready, and a rug was spread out on the ground. I was busy with the tables, that was my job – are you listening? I'm a cook, as it happens. Remember?

GETAS: He's weakening.

SIKON [*becoming more and more extravagant in language and gesture*]: Someone else was decanting a venerable old vintage into a dimpled jar, mixing it with the Naiads' rill, and pledging the men sitting round, while another pledged the ladies (though *that* was like pouring water into sand – get me?). And one of the girls, her [950] young face's bloom shaded, began to dance. She was a bit tipsy, actually, but she danced quite modestly, diffidently and a bit nervously. Then another joined hands with her, and danced too.

GETAS: Poor old man, you have plumbed the depths of human misery. [*Suddenly*] Dance! On to your feet! We'll help you.

KNEMON: What do you want *now*, you pests?

GETAS: Just try. On to your feet, we'll help you. Oh, you *are* a clumsy clot.

KNEMON: No, *please*.

GETAS: Shall we take you to the party, then?

KNEMON: Oh, what shall I do?

GETAS: Dance!

KNEMON: Take me in, then. Perhaps it'll be better to put up with that.

GETAS: NOW you're showing some sense. Hooray, we've won! [*Calls*] Hey, Donax! [*Servant comes out*] You too, Sikon, pick him up and take him inside. [*To*

KNEMON] And you be careful. If ever [960] we find you making a nuisance of yourself again, we won't treat you so tenderly then, I can tell you. [*Calls*] Hey, bring us garlands and a torch. [*They are brought out, and he distributes them*] Take that one. There! [*All go into the shrine except GETAS, who addresses the audience*] You've enjoyed our victory over the old man, now please applaud us, young and old. And may laughter-loving Victory, daughter of a noble line, smile upon us all our days.

[*Exit GETAS, into shrine.*]

Notes

OLD CANTANKEROUS

1. See Production Notice and note 4.
2. This verse summary is attributed in the papyrus to Aristophanes of Byzantium, the great scholar and librarian of the third century B.C. The uneven style, the faults in metre and the misunderstanding of the plot are against this attribution.
3. This probably is derived from Aristophanes of Byzantium, and based on official records.

4. An almost certain correction of the obvious error in the papyrus. Demogenes was archon (chief magistrate of Athens, elected annually, whose name dated the year) in 317–316 B.C. and the festival of the Lenaia would have been held in January, 316.
5. Otherwise unknown. Skarphe was a town in northern Greece, near Thermopylae.
6. It was neither polite nor politic to pass without greeting the statue or shrine of a god, especially the god Pan. (See 1. 433.)
7. The shrine of Leos, in the Market Place at Athens, was a popular meeting place.
8. It is 'worth about two talents', and it was possible to live (frugally) on an estate worth about three quarters of one talent (pseudo-Demosthenes, 42, 22).
9. A district on the east side of Mount Hymettus.
10. This may be her daughter (see Act Five), or a maid.
11. The text is damaged, but the general sense is clear.
12. A fable of Aesop's (122, Hausrath's edition) tells of the gardener who climbed down a well to rescue his dog, and was bitten for his pains.
13. The *aulos* was a wind-instrument, a pipe (single or double), rather like our oboe.
14. Three badly damaged lines follow, in which Sikon starts to describe the party.